

Note from Ambassador Feinstein about the Presidential Medal of Freedom

Dear Friends,

The U.S. Embassy in Warsaw is so proud that President Obama has chosen to honor the legacy of Professor Jan Karski with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award.

In announcing the award yesterday at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the President said, "Let us also tell our children about the Righteous Among the Nations. Among them was Jan Karski, a young Polish Catholic, who witnessed Jews being put on cattle cars, who saw the killings, and who told the truth, all the way to President Roosevelt himself."

Karski was born in pre-war Poland and became a member of the Polish Underground during World War II. He reported abroad on the atrocities committed by the Nazis against Poland's Jewish population. Karski believed he needed to witness the atrocities personally to be able to report with as much authority and detail as possible. To do so, he risked his life to enter the Warsaw Ghetto twice, and penetrated a Nazi killing field, later identified as the Izbica Lubelska transit camp. His account of the brutality and cruelty of the mass killings he witnessed may be the most affecting report of Nazi atrocities I have read.

Jan Karski was a Polish patriot who, in the best Polish tradition, stood up for the principles of human dignity and freedom, whatever the price and against the odds. I hope as a result of the President's decision, Karski's legacy will be even more widely known.

Karski was a citizen of Poland and the United States. His moral example and the values he lived by and espoused exemplify the enduring bonds that have united our countries since America's founding.

Congratulations to Wanda Urbanska and Ewa Wierzynska of the Jan Karski U.S. Centennial Campaign, and to the many people in the United States and Poland who supported their efforts.

We will keep you up to date on events related to this award, and the Karski Centennial.

Sincerely,

Lee Feinstein